

# Vanessa Summers

State Representative • District 99

## 2000 Session of the Indiana General Assembly

### Legislature allocates tobacco settlement funds

#### Bi-partisan agreement to help several programs and groups

Certainly an important achievement of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate the more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will be used for health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.

The final bill was the result of many months of work by legislators on both sides of the aisle. From the start, we have attempted to assure that most of the funding goes to health care and efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

This is a considerable accomplishment for a short session of the Legislature, and it is a tribute to the willingness of officials to set aside partisan differences in order to pass bills that will have long-term benefits for the people of our state.



Rep. Summers discusses legislation with Rep. Greg Porter (D-Indianapolis).

#### Senior citizens will also see benefits of tobacco settlement

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food to eat or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers.

#### Tracking Bias Crimes

Legislation enabling law enforcement officials to track bias crimes in Indiana was approved by the General Assembly.

Officials would be required to report the collected data to the Indiana Central Repository for Criminal History. The legislation defines a bias crime as a crime that a person commits based on another person's race, creed, national origin, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

The purpose of this legislation is to use the collected data to assess whether or not a bias crime problem exists in Indiana. Many other states already report bias crimes and use the data for assessment purposes.

#### New laws impact health care

**Insurance** -- I am pleased to announce that legislation enacted this session will go a long way to increasing insurance coverage for a number of individuals.

One change involving dental health maintenance organizations will mandate that licensed dentists be in charge of making decisions about dental claims. This bill is part of an ongoing effort by the General Assembly to place medical decision-making back into the hands of doctors.

Other legislation requires HMOs to cover patients for colorectal cancer testing based on standards established by the American Cancer Society. People found to be morbidly obese will receive coverage for necessary treatment, including surgery.

Finally, we have reduced the premium tax rate charged to state insurance companies from 2 to 1.3 percent over a five-year period. This move makes the Indiana premium tax rate comparable to surrounding states.

**Medicaid** -- Currently, Indiana requires that a person suffer from a life-long disability in order to receive Medicaid Disability assistance. The General Assembly approved legislation that would replace the life-long requirement with a four-year disability requirement.

Indiana has the most restrictive Medicaid Disability definition in the nation. Forty-eight other states require that a person suffer from a disability for one year. New Hampshire is the only other state which requires a four-year disability.

With so many advances in health care, there is a treatment for almost every type of ailment. Medicaid was designed to help needy individuals, but the current system excludes so many from qualifying for the aid that most other states would offer them.

This is not an attempt to provide free health care to all Hoosiers. It simply modifies the restrictions just enough so that a few more deserving individuals are able to qualify.

#### Helping working men and women

#### New legislation addresses disability, unemployment

Legislators have approved measures that will make substantial changes in coverage for workers who are injured on the job and improve benefits for those people who have lost their jobs.

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Indiana workers who lose their jobs will see unemployment compensation increase by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum



Rep. Summers at her desk in the House Chamber.

benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.

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State legislative web site offers variety of information

The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at [www.state.in.us](http://www.state.in.us) offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

I encourage you to visit my web site at [www.state.in.us/R99](http://www.state.in.us/R99) and explore various items related to the legislature.

A new feature on my web site will allow you to request various House publications. We currently offer publications specifically designed for senior citizens, grade-school children, and high school students in the process of choosing a college. Other publications give a general overview of various Indiana state agencies, offer a guide to women’s health and advise how to avoid being the victim of a scam. There is also a booklet available which details every bill that became law during this year’s legislative session.

You may also request booklets by calling my legislative office at 232-9600.



A screen shot of my legislative home page

E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

Top Five State Web Sites\*

- 1. State Job Bank
- 2. Hoosier Lottery Homepage
- 3. Attorney General's Unclaimed Property Search
- 4. General Assembly homepage
- 5. Dept. of Environmental Management homepage

\*Based on number of visitors as of February 25, 2000

Census 2000. . . why should you fill out the form?

Census 2000 in the State of Indiana means that millions of dollars in federal funding and a congressional seat are at stake. Indiana's population is estimated to be around 6 million -- up from 5.5 million in 1990 (the last official U.S. Bureau of Census count).

You may have already received your federal questionnaire in the mail. The results will be used to determine things like federal highway money and whether or not Indiana will retain all ten of its U.S. House of Representatives districts.

There will be two forms. Nationwide, five out of six households will receive the short form which will ask questions about your name, sex, age, relationship to others in your household, Hispanic origin, race and whether your home is owned or rented. It will take approximately ten minutes to finish the form. A longer form will be mailed to the remaining households, asking questions about education, ancestry, employment, disability and others. This form will take approximately 38 minutes to finish.

To make sure everyone is included, census workers will distribute forms to people who live in group settings, such as universities and colleges, nursing homes, transitional shelters, correctional institutions, and halfway houses.

Forms will be available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Korean. Guides to answering the form will be available in many other languages.

The Census Bureau cannot share your information with others according to the law. This includes Immigration and Naturalization Services, welfare services, Internal Revenue Service, police, courts and the military.

Census facts and figures

- Census officials estimate that they missed more than 8.8 million people in 1990, mostly children, minorities and the poor .That figure includes 12.2 percent of the American Indians living on reservations.
- The federal government plans to spend \$170 million on an advertising campaign to inform and educate people about the census.
- Several government mobile offices will visit more than 400 cities across the country with a traveling exhibit to educate and erase any concerns or fears about participating in the census.
- Four in 10 households did not return the census forms sent by the government in 1990.
- According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, there is
  - one birth every 8 seconds
  - one death every 13 seconds
  - one international migrant (net) every 45 seconds
  - one federal U.S. citizen returning every 4,860 seconds
  - for a net gain of one person every 16 seconds.